

**Remarks by
Mrs. Deborah Mullen
at the
Remembrance Ceremony for Fallen Military Medical Personnel
Arlington National Cemetery
March 11, 2009**

Thank you, Bonnie.

Doctor Cascells, Mr. Woodruff, distinguished guests, members of our Armed Forces ... and most importantly, family members of those we honor here today ... thank you for this opportunity.

I am both honored and humbled to be here ... as I believe we ALL are.

We stand in a cemetery, surrounded by graves ... in the midst of a national shrine to the sacrifices paid for our defense.

But really and truly, we come here to celebrate life.

For today, we pay tribute to the heroes of our heroes, the men and women who risked their own lives and limbs ... to save the lives and limbs of others.

Tongue cannot describe, words fail to convey, the fidelity and the ardor with which these brave souls did their duty.

Who among us knows for certain ... deep in our hearts, in that quiet place we visit as we drift off to sleep, whether we could have done as they did ... whether we could have braved the bullets and the bombs to come to the aid of a fallen comrade?

Who among us doubts for an instant what the sight of a medic or a corpsman, a doctor or a nurse, rushing to one's side, does for the spirit?

Army Corporal Jessica Ellis of Lakeview, Oregon certainly had no doubts.

She deployed twice to Iraq -- serving as an Army medic with the 101st Airborne Division.

"I'm there for my buddies," she had told her father, Steve, just before her second deployment.

And there, in Baghdad last May, Jessica was killed while on combat patrol. She was only 24 years old.

She lies here now in Section 60, at peace, in grave number 8659.

Jessica's story so moved my husband that he wrote about her in a column for Memorial Day.

He wrote about her spunk and her spirit -- about the way she lit up a room and about how much her family and friends missed her.

He also wrote about her dedication to the mission, to her calling.

And that, Michael wrote, was probably how Jessica would MOST like to be remembered -- not for the life she lost ... but for the one she lived, and the ones she saved.

How true that must be for the others in her profession who also lie here and in so many hallowed places around this country.

Their legacy is not in their death. It is NOT in their sacrifice.

It is in the birthdays and the anniversaries, the weddings and the holidays, the first dates and the first born's -- all the cherished memories they made possible for the families they left behind and for thousands of their brothers and sisters in arms.

It is in the hopes we foster ... the dreams we chase ... the laughter and tears and fear and joy, all the things that make us human, all the things that make us alive.

These are their gifts to us. LIFE ... is their legacy.

Steve Ellis, Jessica's father, wrote to Michael not long ago and perhaps put it best: "She stood up for what she believed in," he said of his daughter, "despite her fear, and she served her country well."

So, too, I would add, has every one of the men and women in our military medical profession -- as well as their families.

And I'm not sure that we, as a nation, can EVER ask for more.

To those whose lives we celebrate today ... thank you for standing up for what you believed in.

To those of us who remember and who live on ... let us dedicate ourselves to making the most of the precious gifts we have been given.

Thank you.

